

THE UNITED STATES – SYRIA RELATIONSHIP FROM 2000 TO 2022 YEARS

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Abstract: This article examines the pivotal role of the U.S. in shaping Syrian Foreign Policy, reflecting complex interactions of power dynamics, ideological comparisons, and regional alliances. In addition, the research paper highlights multipolar relations between the two countries over decades. Despite some divergences between both sides, they have had common priorities that brought them together during the terrorist attacks on the Twin Skyscrapers in 2001. Moreover, this study reveals how U.S. actions have had a deep profound on Syria's foreign policy orientations. Particular attention should be given to the post-9/11 accident and Syrian Civil War periods, which jointly demonstrate the shifting priorities of U.S. involvement in the region. Furthermore, this paper explores the impacts of U.S. policies on Syria's alignment with regional and international actors, including Iran, Russia, and non-state entities. Regarding the Syrian civil war, the relations between Washington and Damascus are complicated. The findings underline the centrality of the White House in Syrian foreign policy calculations, not only as a negotiator or mediator but also as a catalyst for Syria's current border issues. The method in this research paper is descriptive-analytical.

Keywords: U.S; America; Syria; Foreign policy; Syrian Civil War

1 INTRODUCTION

In this article, Syria- the United States relations have been analyzed in the two periods. The first period is from 2000 to 2010 and the second period is from 2011 to 2022 accordingly. The first period can be indicated as the main direction of Syrian foreign policy with the Western and Eastern powers. This stage began with a presidential change in Syrian power. In 2000, the death of Hafez al-Assad paved the way for Bashar al-Assad to come to power in Syria.

When Bashar al-Assad was elected as the president of Syria, the US accepted this event positively. Even, after the death of Father Hafiz Assad, State Secretary Bill Clinton paid an official visit to Damascus and delivered condolence to the new President on behalf of the US government. However, the main divergences with the US began with the election of Son Bush as the president of the US on 7 January 2001. After the election of Son Bush as the president of the US, The US has sought to reestablish Washington as a superpower. To achieve this, the White House has tried to affirm the US impact in different regions around the world. As such, the Geo-strategic position of the Middle East has attracted the US attention than ever before. One of the most crucial countries in the region is Syria and Washington has sought good relations with this regional power. It was so obvious that the US was looking for a tactical state that was able to give a hand to Washington to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. On the other hand, the US knows well that Syria has a common border with Iraq. However, several contentious issues soon strained ties, including Syria's continued support for groups like Hezbollah, its opposition to U.S. policies in the region, and its close ties with Iran. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq further deepened mistrust, as Syria was accused of hosting insurgents and destabilizing efforts in Iraq.

The onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 marked a turning point in bilateral relations. The United States criticized the Assad government's brutal response to peaceful protests and provided support to opposition groups calling for political change. At the same time, U.S. priorities in Syria were to combat the rise of ISIS, address humanitarian crises, and prevent the growing influences of Russian and Iranian in the region. Syria's dependence on these allies further made it disloyal to the United States and its Western partners.

By 2022, the relationship was determined by sanctions, isolation, and limited negotiation prospects. The U.S. maintained its focus on humanitarian aid, counterterrorism, and denying legitimacy to the Assad government, while Syria's political and economic ties with Russia and Iran solidified. This period underscores the persistent challenges in U.S. foreign policy, particularly in navigating complex conflicts and competing priorities in the Middle East.

2 THE UNITED STATES – SYRIA RELATIONS DURING THE BASHAR AL-ASSAD ERA

When Bashar al-Assad came to power, Syria was considered one of the most stable, and dynamic developed countries of the Middle East. The Palestine struggle, the Lebanon issue, and the relationship with Israel remained amidst crucial priorities of foreign policy.

When Bashar al-Assad was elected as the president of Syria, the US accepted this event positively. Even, after the death of Father Hafiz Assad, State Secretary Bill Clinton paid an official visit to Damascus and delivered condolence to the new President on behalf of the US government. Although everything was going its way, the failures in foreign policy began for Bashar al-Assad with the election of Son Bush as the president of the US on 7 January 2001, and of Ariel Sharon as the head minister of Israel in the same year of February 6. These two historical events squeezed the manoeuvrability and space of Syria in the international world.

“The presidency of George W. Bush was the single most destructive time for American/Syrian relations” [1]. The Bush administration took Syria into account as a tactical state that was able to give a hand to the US to overthrow the Saddam Hussein government in Iraq. Because it is clear that Syria had a mutual border with Iraq. Therefore, the Bush administration tried to hit the Saddam regime with the hands of Syria. Thus, Syria was included in the list of regional tours under the leadership of Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The stories and relations of the Bush doctrine made hope of appeasing Syria and the US. The global occasions and martial efforts made Bush choose to either continue with Syria or pull back from these effective improvements achieved between both countries. The nonstory approaches of the Bush administration toward Syria retreated from the scenario that was founded by the Bill Clinton administration. The period that subjected Syria to pressures and isolation by the international community began with the 11 September 2001 historical event. This story was condemned by the international community. Exactly, after this occasion, the relationship with America entered a new stage. *“The National Security Strategy of the United States of America signed on 17 September 2002 and made publication on 20 September approved America’s new foreign policy”* [2]. America with this concept declared that the USA aims at the establishment of a kind of new world order with items such as freedom, human rights, human dignity, and a free economic market, and the prevention of the powers that can break these orders with military endeavours.

After the 11 September 2001 accident, the impact of the New Tory group on the foreign policy of the US was noticed explicitly. The New Tory group considered the world after 1989 as new opportunities and threats. The 11 September accident created an opportunity that they desired for the implementation of their thoughts. *“The terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001, and the reactions of the US to them became the beginning of a new era”* [3]. This new world order can be estimated as the beginning of the 21st century, and a new world war. The calamity of 11 September vibrated across the world. Most of the states gathered at the head of America and stood shoulder to shoulder with it, but Syria was not underlined as an outlier.

The new president Bashar Assad immediately answered the official Washington. Bashar Al-Assad put forward a new proposal in which the new meeting should be called on Al-Qaeda leaders and operatives. Syria gave a hand to Washington in capturing Al-Qaeda terrorist members, because Syria had a hostile relation with Al-Qaeda. Syria was at the side of the Bush regime’s decision to wage a war with Iraq. According to the relevant accounts, Syria was the one that voted for the occupation of Iraq by the US and the UK allies. Many resources argue that Syria was afraid of the invasion of Iraq by America and did not like this process. According to the view of the US State Department, Syria was against the war in Iraq. *“In early 2002, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that Syria was also a member of the “axis of evil” that included Iran, Iraq, and North Korea”* [1]. The US carried out the oppressive foreign policy concept based on politicians such as R.Perle, D.Cheney, and P.Wolfowitz. Thomas Barnett in his book divided the world into two spheres: the developed or globalized, and safe part called the “nucleus”, and the underdeveloped, and posed a threat to a new world order called “crack”. According to Francis Fukuyama, the primary cause for this situation was the establishment of the little and weak countries that did not achieve appreciable achievements because of the Cold War. The main elements, which legalized America’s military power policy, were the struggle with global terrorism, and the advancement of psychological caused by the 11 September event. *“According to America’s declarations, the vital region that threatens the world order is the Middle East. However, Iraq and Afghanistan were the main countries which were most encountered by America’s interventions, but also Syria and Iran were added to the list of the countries in Bush’s “East Arrow”* [2]. Thus, the US added the “Regime Change” to its new foreign policy conception. The presence of the Syrian military powers in Lebanon worried the US day by day, at the same time, the news related to the Syrian Republic has mass destruction of weapons began to emerge on the world agenda.

During the military intervention towards Iraq, the Bush administration began to adopt a strict foreign policy in relation to Syria. Therefore, Syria was indifferent to the presence of the United States in Iraq as the Syrian side awaited Bush’s escalating issues in Iraq and was able to encounter it to take joint regard in the direction of Syria in order to normalize the situation inside the country. On the one side, Bashar Al-Assad thought Syria had many cards in its hands to keep its power and influence, as well as respectively, its vital position in the peace process between the Arab countries and Israel, and the constancy of the region. Assad believed that Syria’s control over Lebanon and Hezbollah, which both have an efficient power to harm Israel and its exploratory ability to help the US in the fight against terrorism. On the other side, he strongly trusted that Syria would not deal with international punishments and was not excluded from the international stage like Iraq’s leader Saddam Hussein was. Assad also thought that Syria’s political system was comprised of many different parties, which struggled against Islamic Fundamentalism inside the country, thereby Syria turned into a companion of the US, which aimed at holding the peace process in the region.

All these events put Syria in a trouble situation in the Middle East, and a turning point in American and Syria relations was the Iraq war in 2003. Before the war, Syria did not exist in the circle of interest of America, but Bashar Assad's speech supporting Iraq led to the contradictions in the US and Syria relations. Even, in this war, the Syrian military volunteers fell on the battlefield on the side of Iraq. During this period, Syria was noticing what would happen to Iraq. Assad wisely examined this situation, as the neutralization of Iraq alone in the region would not satisfy America. *"The US presented and continued to insist on a list of demands on Syria – to expel militant Palestinian factions, dismantle Hezbollah, withdraw from Lebanon and cooperate with the occupation regime in Iraq"* [4]. *"Also of concern to the United States are reported Syrian efforts to expand its weapons of mass destruction capabilities"* [5]. *"After the completion of Iraq's invasion, there was an expectation that Syria was the next target of the US. President Bashar al-Assad responded that the United States would not attack Syria because it was not Iraq"* [6]. The Syrian government was accused of advancing chemical weapons, and exactly the mass destruction of weapons, as well as permitting enemy militants to enter its territory to hit the US military bases located in Iraq. *"The chief White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Syria is a "rogue nation" [7].*

In fact, when we carefully estimate the post-war process, it is not hard to acknowledge that the primary aims of America related to the Middle East were only to seek resolutions to the Israel-Palestine war. Thus, it is a fact that the official Washington did not involve Lebanon, and Syria in the peace process for the Palestinian and Israeli problem, but this attitude towards both countries prevented its implementation. According to the US, it considered Syria as a vital attendee in this process.

The "Syrian Law" sanction was passed by the US Congress against Syria and was declared official by the decision of Bush on December 12, 2003. It came into force in May 2004. *In January of the same year, "US Senator Part Roberts argued that the chemical weapons which were ruined in Iraq were kept in Syria. The Iraq Survey Group also found no evidence to support allegations that Iraq had moved WMD to Syria before the war, which some administration officials had said was possible"*[8]. In May 2004 the export of all American goods to Syria was prohibited, outside of medicine, and food products. Despite this sanction did not affect Syria's economy comprehensively. It simply led to the Isolation of Syria from the political stage. The new stage in the relations of the two states began with Bush's "Greater Middle East" project that diffuses democracy in the region. This became a breaking point in the US and Syria relations.

On February 14, 2005, Former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in Beirut, Lebanon. This event reverberated across the global world, which strictly affected the America – Syria relations. After the assassination, the pressure of the US, BM issued a resolution against Syria and demanded immediate withdrawal of its military detachments from Lebanon. Bashar Assad instructed the withdrawal of the Syrian military army from the territory of Lebanon as much as possible. Moreover, the US wanted Syria to put an end to the presence of Syria in Lebanon. *"Hariri, the nationalist who'd dared to stand against Syria, Lebanon's longtime occupier, and in his day was the most important reformer in the Middle East"* [9]. *"Lebanon is perhaps Bashar's most challenging issue since the stakes are so high"* [10]. The US immediately accused Syria of committing suicide. After the assassination of Hariri, the Bush administration called back its ambassador from Syria to approve a "new constitution".

"In January 2005, when former Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage visited Damascus, Syria agreed to further enhance security and intelligence cooperation with the U.S. to include any terrorist crossing from Syria into Iraq"[11, p.34]. In mid-February 2005, Syria announced that it had locked two Al-Qaeda bases in Homs and Aleppo cities. The Bush administration expressed its dissatisfaction regarding the standard of the Syrian collaboration. The U.S. and Syria relations had led to the lowest level after Hariri's suicide. On May 20, 2005, the Official Washington stressed that they were worried about Syria's treatment along its border, about the handle for terrorist organizations, also the fund backing that was sent from Syrian territory. *"At the conference with Talabani, George Bush said that we are working with our allies, to concentrate on Syria to exchange its treatment related to the improvement of democracy in the region"*[12].

The Iraq Study Group organized a negotiation with Bashar Assad with the participation of some American senators in December 2006. This group declared that Bush had to approach Syria. The group also stated that Syria could affect the events in Iraq, and halting it. The recommendation called on Bush to immediately take the initiative to begin a dialogue with Syria to handle the issues between both parties, such as the influx of fighters and financing them in Iraq. The resumption of the U.S.' obedience to the Middle East peace negotiations, and the Syria and Israel peace talks were among the proposals. Still, the Bush administration denied adhering to the group's advice.

"On 10 January 2007, Bush applied to Iraq nation and stated that: "this begins with addressing Iran and Syria. These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq. Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria" [13]. Despite the contradictions between states, in March 2007, with the participation of the U.S., Syria and Iran held a high-level meeting in Baghdad to point out Iraq's socio-economic, security, and understanding issues. The attendees of the meeting came to an agreement on the creation of three working groups on displaced people, electricity, and security. The Bush administration eliminated the two-year ban on diplomatic visits to Damascus owing to the increasing displaced crisis in the Middle East region.

In 2008, Syria's resolution for the Iraqi uprising by creating space for an influx of fighters, military forces, and finance stood at the centre of issues between the two states. On October 26, 2008, the American armed forces assaulted a Syrian rural, which was six kilometres far away from the boundary, and killed a chief organizer of a terrorist group who was

providing Al-Qaeda with dangerous weapons in Iraq. The Administration stated that the attack was not apart from the former one carried out in Pakistan and Afghanistan respectively. According to the Bush administration, it was conducted to provide security for the American and its allied forces. Despite Bashar Assad did not fight back against the US attack. By conducting this military operation, the Bush administration was trying to manifest that Syria was the supporter of the terrorist groups and insurgents, therefore Syria should be considered as the center of terrorists.

By the end of 2008, Syria put up with the Western campaign towards Damascus, and collaborations seemed to advance. *“Russia declared war on Georgia in 2008, and seized Abkhazia and South Ossetia, annexation of Crimea, military intervention in Eastern Ukraine, and finally, the involvement in the Syrian war was a result of the USA’s lacking strategic foresight, and the EU’s strategic inadequacy”* [14].

On the other side, the impact of the global economic crisis which emerged in America, and deeply influenced the power balance in the Middle East region. *“The 2008 shift in the power balance toward Syria in Lebanon precipitated a shift at the international level in which French President Sarkozy broke with the US policy of isolating Syria, the symbol of which was his invitation of Bashar to the Paris launch of his new European-Mediterranean union where Syria’s accession to the European- Mediterranean partnership was again put on the agenda”* [15]. *“Until 2009, Syria has regulated to place Damascus between two frameworks: firstly, Damascus was the main ally of the “resistance axis” led by Iran, disobedience of the West allowed to improve the collaborations with the Asian region, and restored safety and socio-economic ties with Russia; secondly, the Western options brought up: it showed itself in hostility with France, Turkish-mediated the peace negotiations with invader Israel, and discussions with Obama administration. If Syria’s proposals were considered or denied Damascus could tilt the first way or the second one, the US sanctions on the economy and particularly the Syrian commercial bank obstructed aspects of the regime’s attempted global financial integration, discouraged companies from doing business in Syria and made more difficult and expensive the acquisition of key components needed for flagship sectors of economy such as banking, oil, and telecommunications”*[15].

In 2009 of May, the new Obama government made as good as new US sanctions, among charges that the influx of fighters or insurgents to Iraq by the support of the Syrian regime had continued. From 2010 to 2011, the relations between both states did not notice any positive changes and remained at the previous level due to the spread of the global drought across the world. In 2011, the Uprising was started by a dozen of farmers to stop this economic crisis in the country turned into the “Civil War” inside Syria.

3 A SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: THE UNITED STATES AND SYRIA RELATIONS

The US population’s lack of interest in more military operations in the Middle East after the failure in Iraq and Lebanon interferences formed America’s strategy towards the Syrian Civil War. *“The events of the Arab Spring flared up exactly in the middle of the first presidential term of Barack Obama”* [16]. During the first year of the Civil War, the strategy of President Obama in Syria focused on harsh declarations and approbations. The USA’s first reflection on the Syrian Civil War was also quite indefinite and consisted of verbal judgment tracked by inactivity. Since 2011 March, Washington’s efforts were to prevent the vigour against the Syrian population and accelerate the removal of Assad, thus the rebel movements broke out peacefully, and however, the Assad regime's aggressive reflection turned it into a bloody carnation. The US dwelled on the Syrian regime must encounter the insurgents.

In 2011 of April for the first time, Obama commented on Syria. *In his statement, he strongly condemned “the abhorrent violence committed against peaceful protesters by the Syrian government today and over the past few weeks. He called upon the Syrian authorities to refrain from any further violence against peaceful protesters”* [17].

In 2011 August, President Obama declared: “We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way” [18]. On August 18 2011, Barack Obama formally appealed for Syrian President Assad to abdicate his presidency, then adopted strict approbations on the Damascus’ Central Bank, and prohibited Syrian petrol’s export. In the same year of October, Washington recalled its ambassador from Syria. In February 2012, the United States cut off diplomatic relations with Syria. Then, the intensifying tensions in Syria were carried on to the UN and under the leadership of Kofi Annan prepared a Syrian Plan. A six-point Syrian Plan prepared by Kofi Annan came into force. Within the framework of this plan from Assad’ regime: a ceasefire of over 2 hours every day was demanded to access Humanitarian aid to the places in need, release arrested protesters, provide the free movement of news-makers within the country, and It was demanded to be respected to the right of peaceful assembly and protest. The visit of Annan to Syria and a six-point roadmap put forward to Assad in return had received commitments and had become the hope resource for the countries, which were keen on this issue. However, after that day, the continuation of the same tactics by Assad’s regime stood for all hopes dropped into water. His strategy was to employ external pressure to reach a ceasefire paving the way for the political transition. *“After weeks of back-and-forth discussions, a ceasefire was established on 12 April 2012”*[19].

In July 2012, “Western countries made attempts to pass a resolution de facto accusing the Syrian government of violating the ceasefire and threatening to take measures in accordance with Article 41, but Russia and China were forced to veto this project” [16]. Against the veto of Russia and China, Western countries, including the US and its Middle East allies agreed on the creation of an informal contact group the so-called “Friends of Syria Group” on Syria. The first summit of the group was organised in Tunisia on February 24, 2012. Later on, three more meetings of the group were arranged respectively in

Istanbul in April, Paris in July, and Morocco in December 2012. As a result of the Istanbul summit, it was agreed to establish an operative group on approbations against the Syrian government. The last decision was approved after the Paris meeting, it was explicitly stressed that President Bashar Assad must step down. The strictest political measures were taken at the Morocco meeting in December 2012. *President Barack Obama one day before said that "today his administration formally recognizes the newly-formed, leading coalition of Syrian rebels who are fighting to topple Syria's embattled President Bashar Assad"* [20].

In August 2012, US President Obama drew "a red line for the Syrian government, saying that any use of chemical weapons by Assad's regime on his people may result in military operation" [21]. Despite the calls from Obama, Assad ignored them and continued the utilization of chemical warfare against innocent civilians in December 2012 and then, the USA Intelligence Service began to investigate whether the WMD had been used in Syria or not. According to the report of the Intelligence Service, Syria had used chemical weapons in the conflict. *Their hesitance to do so earlier was "one of the legacies of the Iraq war, which the United States waged based on false reports about weapons of mass destruction"* [22]. Washington came up with the fact that the WMD was carried on from Iraq to Syria during the invasion of Iraq. Therefore, the Intelligence community of America took years to investigate WMD bases in Syria; however, it was only a claim. By doing so, the US was trying to bring the violated actions of the Assad regime against its citizens up to the international community's attention to isolate Syria from the international stage like Iraq. The US understood that without having a regional ally would be impossible to achieve its goals on the Syrian issue. The only regional ally was Saudi Arabia supporting the US stance in the region. Therefore, Saudi Arabia was involved in the peace conferences on the Syrian issue. In August 2012, with the arrival of Lakhdar Brahimi, a new meeting on Syria started to be organized with the initiatives of the US and Russia. While the first, the majority giving support for Damascus, attempted to commence a dialogue with the frugal opposition, the second urgently demanded: "Assad must step down". The Second reason was that the occasion of a chemical assault in Ghouta caused the delay in the summons of Geneva 2, which occurred in August 2013, and that incident paved the way for the military intervention of the US in the Syrian conflict. The third reason was the split in the ranks of the Syrian opposition into frugal, secular and religious extremist forces worsened the process of defining who was able to be chosen as a candidate to appear for the affinities of the Syrian civilians. Furthermore, many players on the Syrian issue were not involved in the list of conference participants including Iran and the Syrian Kurds. The UN eliminated their invitation with the stubborn resistance of the US and the pro-Western Syrian dissent.

After all, Geneva 2 started in Monteux on January 22, 2014, "thanks to some détente in relations between Russia and the United States" [16]. The US Secretary of State John Kerry was the representative of the US at the meeting. *He insistently stressed that "Bashar Assad will not be part of that transition government. There is no way- no way possible in the imagination that the man who had led the brutal response to his people could regain the legitimacy to govern"* [16]. On the other side, the US carried on clarifying the context of the talks one-sidedly. At the end of the conference, Secretary Kerry condemned the Syrian regime for shattering the peace process in February 2014. Such circumstances in the course of the peace talks were a way to reinforce the US position on the ground. *On 10 September 2014, Obama in his statement said that Assad "terrorizes its own people" and "will never regain the legitimacy it has lost" so that in this struggle the US "cannot rely" on it* [16]. However, no progress was achieved in the Geneva 2-peace Conference due to both did not parties compromise with each other. Washington was the latest balance keeper in the region, and the US-Tehran and Saudi Arabia conversation was vital for setting a strategy for the future. Washington's misfortunes in taking constructive measures paved the way for the breeding ground for jihadists in the region. The circumstances changed considerably when Russia began a military intervention in Syria on September 30, 2015, thus it strengthened its stance as a key player in the Civil War. As a result, on 23 October 2015, the foreign ministers of the US, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia and Russia met in a preliminary summit for the Vienna talks on the Syrian conflict. More than a dozen states united with them and they set up the International Syria Support Group, which was chaired by both Russia and the US. In terms of a change in the US stance on the Syrian crisis, the Vienna talks became an achievement in two proportions. To begin with, the US focused on the involvement of Iran in the peace negotiations on the Syrian conflict. Meanwhile, this was because of a recent agreement on nuclear with Iran, after the achievement of which Washington was keen on expanding collaboration with Tehran. *Moreover, "The US has concluded that the only hope for easing Mr. Assad from power is to find a political solution with his two sponsors"* [15]. Secondly, it was related to Assad, *"Secretary Kerry slightly facilitated his aggression regarding Bashar Assad, saying that the vital thing was to halt the violations and lay the groundwork for the transitional body in which the "Syrians themselves are deciding the future of Syria"* [24].

On the other side, the US was concerned about Russia and Tehran providing to prop up Assad. The result of two rounds of peace negotiations brought about a new peace project, which was displayed on November 14, 2015. In that peace plan, the participants indicated their support for a political solution to the conflict. They expressed support for fighting together against ISIS and defeating it. In May 2018, Washington's stance toward the Syrian peace process was subject to a considerable change. Before the ninth round of Astana negotiations, Washington declined to admit the invitation to participate in the talks as a bystander. The main reason for this decision was the foundation of the Constitutional Committee during the ninth round Astana conference, which was opposite to America's belief that diplomatic talks on Syria ought to be held in Geneva. On April 14, 2018, Pentagon spokesperson Dana White in the Pentagon Briefing room stressed that "we don't seek conflict in Syria, but we can not allow such grievous violations of international law [25]. Moreover, she added

that our aim in Syria was to defeat ISIS, but we would not stay silent while Assad supported by Tehran and Moscow avoids international law.

In 2020, “the US began to make statements to completely discredit the Astana process” [16]. In February 2020, the US ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft stressed that the Astana format is no longer believed to stop violence in Syria. It was obvious that the Syrian peace process was no longer suited to the affinity of Washington in any way. After the Russian military intervention in Ukraine gradually changed the situation. In June 2022, USA Ambassador Richard Mills stated the responsibility for the failure of the peace process on Assad’s regime, as it kept hampering the opportunity for any yielded talks with its bullheadedness.

Since the end of 2022, the US demanded SAR take meaningful actions and display its loyalty to the political transition. The US must engage with Tehran, and Saudi Arabia, as it may be the best chance to halt further decay in Syria. When doing so, Washington could protect its stance and its allies in the region from the escalating threat of Islamist fundamentalism.

4 CONCLUSION

Overall, bilateral relations between Syria and the United States from 2000 to 2022 years demonstrate a fraught and dynamic history formed by geopolitical rivalries, shifting global power balance and priorities, and also the current realities of regional instability. This period was characterized by significant litigation as the two countries preferred to pursue controversial agendas. More importantly, major milestones in the two nations’ relations included an increased Washington survey of Damascus following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, escalating tensions over Syria’s military presence in Lebanon, and disunity during the Syrian Civil War.

When Bashar al-Assad assumed power in Syria, sparking the hope of new reforms and changes in Western countries. However, the main divergences began with the election of Son Bush as the president of the United States on 7 January 2001. That event squeezed the manoeuvrability of Assad’s Syria in the International community, and international sanctions and isolations started for Syria from this period.

On the one side, the Bush administration has sought to reestablish Washington's stance as a superpower in the region. To achieve this, Washington tried to affirm its influence and presence in the Middle East. As such, the Middle East has become a more important place for the U.S than ever before in terms of its geo-strategic position. By creating a close tie with Damascus, the U.S tried to enter into the region as a superpower. However, the new regime of Damascus leaned heavily towards Russia and Iran as the main allies of Syria in the region. In opposition to these allies, the United States expanded relations with Arabic countries such as Saudi Arabia. Because Saudi Arabia was one of the important countries in the region, it was against the presence of Iran in the Syrian areas. By the way, the United States was concerned that Russia and Iran could prop up Bashar al-Assad. Therefore, U.S. policy toward Syria often alternated between strategies of containment, support for opposition movements, and counterterrorism efforts, particularly during the fight against ISIS. Meanwhile, the Syrian government, led by Bashar al-Assad, resisted U.S. pressure by strengthening its ties with allies such as Russia and Iran, enabling it to weather international isolation and retain power despite devastating internal conflict. Throughout this period, U.S. sanctions and diplomatic measures further strained relations but failed to achieve significant political reforms or regime change in Damascus. It was obvious that the U.S tried to implement the same policy, which it had done in Iraq before. It means that under the name of counterterrorism, the U.S maintained its presence and stance in Syria against called “devil allies”. After the collapse of Saddam's regime in Iraq, the U.S tried to use emerging this vacuum as a regime change in Syria.

The eruption of the Civil War in Syria alerted the U.S policy against Syria from “a regime supporter” to “the care of the Syrian civilians”. Even if Washington accused Assad’s regime of using chemical weapons against innocent civilians during raids. The U.S. Intelligence Service claimed that insurgents had carried these chemical weapons from Iraq to Syria. This claim did not reflect itself on reality.

In 2012, with the initiatives of the U.S and Russia, a new meeting convened in Geneva to restore a sense of peace and put an end to the conflict in Syria. Unfortunately, as Geneva conferences both Astana and Vienna meetings ended up fruitless. These conferences showcased the political process could be the key to bringing both parties around the same table, but if the participating countries give up seeking opportunities for the sake of their countries’ interests.

As of 2022, Syria remains a deeply fractured state, its recovery stymied by ongoing humanitarian crises, unresolved political conflicts, and a fragmented international response. U.S. influence in Syria has been eclipsed in many areas by that of Russia and Iran, whose strategic and military support bolstered the Assad regime. The complex legacy of U.S.-Syria relations during these two decades underscores the enduring challenges of addressing instability, fostering peace, and navigating the geopolitical entanglements of the Middle East. Moving forward, the relationship is likely to remain contentious, defined by competing priorities and the broader struggle for regional influence.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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